

February 14, 2023

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TESTIMONY ON SB#285 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

County Police Accountability Boards - Investigation of Complaints of Police Misconduct

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and member of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Melissa Coretz Goemann

My name is Melissa Coretz Goemann. I am a resident of District 20. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 285. I live in Silver Spring and am an active member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Synagogue. I am also very involved in juvenile and criminal justice reform through my work as policy counsel for a national organization and my work with several local volunteer groups.

I care about this bill because of my belief in the biblical precept, “*Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof – Justice, justice you shall pursue.*” Through my work on justice issues, I know that our system of policing in Maryland often does not treat people, particularly Black and Brown people, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and those experiencing mental health crises in a just manner. Accountability is an important key to moving reform forward, which is why strong Police Accountability Boards (PABs) are so vital.

The General Assembly passed HB 670 in 2021 in order to provide independent, community-controlled oversight into police misconduct. Independent investigatory and subpoena powers are an essential part of how PABs can fulfill their mandate, otherwise they are largely hamstrung in their ability to fulfill this role. However, language in HB 670 on this issue was unclear and local jurisdictions hesitated to authorize these powers to their PABs. This bill is needed to explicitly allow local jurisdictions to provide their PABs with independent investigatory and subpoena powers and provide necessary funding for them.

In order to provide justice for the people of Maryland, Police Accountability Boards must be explicitly allowed to conduct investigations of their own to provide accurate assessments of complaints and their outcomes, and to accurately assess the quality of investigations. This bill will allow PABs to do so. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB# 285.**